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Surprise & delight: exceeding student expectations

Abstract

This paper discusses and shows how expectancy theory based on the work of service quality gurus Berry and Parasuraman can be applied to English language teaching in a university in Japan.

Many language teachers are concerned about the evaluations that they receive from their students on centrally-administered student evaluations of courses and teaching, i.e. student feedback questionnaires (SFQ). The SFQ results may be used by teachers for developmental purposes, but are also often used by administrators to judge who the so-called best teachers are.

This session will describe action research conducted at four universities over a period of ten years. Some teachers had received warnings that their contracts may not be renewed if their SFQ scores did not improve. Those teachers were approached and offered assistance. On applying the advice given, they were able to increase their SFQ mean scores in one term from among the lowest scores to above their respective departmental averages. This made a significant difference to their livelihoods as they were able to retain their posts.

It concludes with a model of service quality that can be applied in ELT. A number of practical suggestions related to this model will be given.